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VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR NAMED

December 17, 2012 by Sue Reeves

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Katie Lovendale (left) and Amber Hartley, CPD's 2012 Volunteers of the Year

Katie Lovendale and Amber Hartley were named 2012 Volunteers of the Year by Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities (CPD) for their work with Aggie Advocates. The special education majors were honored at the annual Holiday Lunch with beach bags filled with CPD goodies and an engraved plaque, which will be hung at the CPD.

Aggie Advocates was formed last year with the help of Jeff Sheen, training and development specialist and volunteer coordinator at the CPD, and associate director of development Shane Johnson.

"We couldn't have done it without the CPD," said Lovendale, who will graduate in May. Hartley, who graduated this semester, agreed, saying, "I don't think we would have a club without Jeff and Shane."

Sheen and Johnson met Lovendale and Hartley at the 2011 Day on the Quad, a day of self-promotion for campus organizations at the beginning of the school year. Through a set of "fortunate circumstances," said Sheen, they began to work together on Aggie Advocates.

Sheen said that as the CPD volunteer coordinator, one of the best parts of his job is to come across pro-active individuals like Lovendale and Hartley, who volunteered their time to make the world a better place.

"We are fortunate to have that caliber of student at USU," Sheen said.

Lovendale and Hartley became familiar with an advocacy project being conducted by Barbara DeBoer, clinical assistant professor in the early childhood education program. Soon after, they saw a high school play about the Little Rock 9 and that group's efforts to end racial discrimination.

"It was inspiring," Hartley said. "We said, 'what if we did that?'"

Lovendale said racial discrimination doesn't seem to be so prevalent on college campuses anymore, but people with disabilities still face discrimination. There were no existing advocacy groups at USU, and the pair wanted to educate people on disability issues.

Currently, there are more than 200 names on the Aggie Advocate e-mail list, they said, although not all of them attend meetings or help with events.

According to Hartley, the Aggie Advocates hosted a Halloween carnival for the ASSERT and Up to 3 programs, as well as an event on "Spread the Word to End the Word" Day and a movie night.

This year, the group painted the pumpkins used in the Up to 3 Program's Pumpkin Walk display, and organized a fundraiser so that a local family could buy a headstone for their daughter, who died five years ago. More than \$500 was raised.

While Lovendale and Hartley are no longer part of the Aggie Advocate leadership, they are excited to see that the membership has become more diverse, with majors other than special education represented.